

PARENTING TIPS FOR DEALING WITH CHILD FIRESETTING BEHAVIORS

This handout is intended to assist you in dealing with the problem your child is experiencing. If you do not feel your efforts are solving the problem, seek additional help starting with Utah State Fire Marshal's Office Youth Firesetting and Juvenile Arson Program. The Program Manager can be reached at 801-284-6350.

- Keep matches and lighters out of reach of your child. Most children are only involved with fire because it is available to them. Availability is usually controllable by ADULTS.
- Do not hide matches and lighters. This promotes secrecy and distrust. Keep them in a safe and secure place and let your child know that you expect to always find the matches and lighters in that spot.
- Set a responsible example as an adult. Children are great imitators. They will do as you do, not as you say. Think about the way YOU use matches and lighters. Through the eyes of a child, does it look like you are using a dangerous and potentially deadly tool? If not, change the way you use this tool.
- Treat matches and lighters like you do other dangerous tools in your home. Items of comparable danger might be sharp kitchen knives or loaded guns.
- Reward your child when they do the right things. Children respond much better to positive discipline than negative. In other words, let them know you are pleased when they do the right things, do not only punish them for doing the wrong things.
- Tell your child what you expect them to do when they find matches and lighters. Most parents are very good at saying what they do not want children to do but do not always say what they expect of the child.
- Do not be secretive about the behavior. Just as it is important for you to understand how to create a safe home for your child, it is equally important for the babysitter, grandparents, or other relatives/caregivers.
- Unrealistic explanations of what fire can do will not make sense to children. Making matches and lighters seem like evil or bad things make no sense when you will be seen using them within your home (why would you use something that is evil or bad?).
- Provide good supervision for your child. Most firesetting occurs when children are unattended.
- Avoid trying to teach your child about fire by watching television programs or movies. Nearly all of these are in very unrealistic terms that are nothing more than sensationalism.
- If you need matches and lighters in your home, limit the number to the least possible. Also, search your home for any items that may have been forgotten (in basements, garages, etc.)
- Place a smoke detector in your child's room or other areas where they may have been using fire. This will provide early warning if something goes wrong.
- Explain the consequences of misbehavior clearly and follow through if the child breaks the rules.